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News

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UNION MEMBERS IN 1990

An estimated 16.7 million wage and salary employees in the United States were union members in 1990, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. The number of union members has remained near 17 million since 1985.

Union membership stood at 16.1 percent of employment last year, down from 16.4 percent in 1989, continuing the downward trend that began in the early 1960's. This decline in union membership as a proportion of employment occurred in three stages:

- From the early 1960's through 1979, the number of union members increased, but at a slower rate than overall employment;
- From 1979 to 1985, union membership fell while employment rose;
- From 1985 to 1990, union membership declined slightly, while employment continued to rise.

Union members' characteristics

In 1990, the distribution of union members by industry and occupation and by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin was similar to 1989. (See table 1.)

There were 10.3 million union members in private industry and 6.5 million in government in 1990. (See table 2.) In the private sector, the industry group with the most union members was manufacturing (4.2 million), followed by transportation and public utilities (1.9 million), services (1.4 million), wholesale and retail trade (1.3 million), and construction (1.1 million). Each of the other industries had fewer than 175,000 union members.

Union members constituted 37 percent of employment in government (Federal, state, and local), compared with 12 percent in private industry. Among major private industry groups, transportation and public utilities had the highest union proportion, 32 percent. Other major private industry groups with above average membership proportions were

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construction and manufacturing (both 21 percent) and mining (18 percent). The remaining private industry groups had unionization rates ranging from 2 to 6 percent. Despite their relatively low unionization rates, trade and services combined had 2.7 million union members--slightly more than one-fourth of all union members in private industry.

The highest union membership proportions among the major occupational groups, about one in four, were found in the operators, fabricators, and laborers group (including machine and vehicle operators, assemblers, cleaners, and helpers) and in the precision production, craft, and repair workers group (including mechanics, electricians, and similar skilled trades workers). Union membership proportions were no more than about one in ten in the farming, forestry, and fishing occupations and in the technical, sales, and administrative support group.

The proportion of union membership was higher among men (19 percent) than women (13 percent) and higher among blacks (21 percent) than either whites (16 percent) or Hispanics (15 percent). Within these major groups, black males had the highest union membership proportion (24 percent), while white females had the lowest (12 percent). Among the major age groups, workers aged 35 to 64 were more likely to be union members (20-22 percent) than either younger or older workers.

A total of 15.4 million full-time workers (18 percent of full-timers) were union members, compared with 1.3 million part-time workers (7 percent).

In addition to the 16.7 million wage and salary employees who were union members in 1990, there were 2.3 million workers who were represented at their workplace by a union, but were not union members. Somewhat more than one-half of the employees who were not union members, but were represented by a union, were in government.

Earnings

Among full-time wage and salary workers, union members had median usual earnings of $509 per week in 1990, compared with a median of $390 for workers not in unions. (See table 3.) These averages reflect a variety of influences, including coverage by a collective bargaining agreement and variations in the distribution of union and nonunion members by occupation, industry, firm size, or geographic region. (For a discussion of the problem of differentiating between the influence of unionization status and the influence of other worker characteristics on employee earnings, see *Monthly Labor Review*, June 1990, pp. 26-38.)

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EXPLANATORY NOTE ABOUT THE DATA

The union membership and earnings estimates presented in this release are obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The CPS provides estimates of all wage and salary employees reported as union members and also for those being represented by a union at their work place, regardless of whether they were union members. Union members include employees belonging to traditional labor unions or to employee associations similar to labor unions. The membership estimates exclude workers who are self-employed, retired, or unemployed.

Reliability

The CPS estimates of union membership are based on a scientifically selected probability sample, rather than a census of the entire population. These sample-based estimates may differ from the results obtained from a census of the population. The sample used was one of many possible samples, each of which could have produced different estimates. The variation in the sample estimates across all possible samples that could have been drawn is measured by the standard error. The standard error is used to calculate a "confidence interval" around a sample estimate.

The 90-percent confidence interval is the interval centered at the sample estimate and includes all values within 1.6 times the estimate's standard error. If several different sample were selected to estimate the population value (e.g., union membership), the 90-percent confidence interval would include the true population value approximately 90 percent of the time.

For example, the estimate of 16,740,000 employed union members in 1990 has an estimated standard error of about 126,000. Hence, we are 90 percent confident that the interval between 16,942,000 and 16,538,000 (or 16,740,000 $\pm$ 1.6 x 126,000) includes the true population value for union membership.

The data are also subject to nonsampling error. For example, information on job-related characteristics of the worker--industry, occupation, union membership, and earnings--are sometimes reported by a household member other than the worker. Consequently, such data may reflect reporting error by the respondent. Moreover, in some cases, reported earnings may be "take home" pay rather than gross earnings, or reported earnings may be rounded up or down from actual earnings.

For a general discussion of the quality of employment data from the CPS, see the Explanatory Note section of any issue of Employment and Earnings, published monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For a discussion of the quality of earnings data from the CPS, see Earl F. Mellor, *Technical Description of the Quarterly Data on Weekly Earnings from the Current Population Survey*, BLS Bulletin 2113, January 1982.

Definitions

The principal definitions used in this release are described briefly below.

Wage and salary employees. Employees who receive wages, salaries, commissions, tips, payment in kind, or piece rates. This group includes employees in both the private and public sectors, but, for the purposes of the earnings series, excludes self-employed persons whose businesses are incorporated.

Full-time workers. Workers who usually work 35 hours or more per week at their sole or principal job.

Part-time workers. Workers who usually work fewer th 35 hours per week at their sole or principal job.

Hispanic origin. Refers to persons who are of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or of other Hispanic origin or descent. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race; hence, they are included in the numbers for the white and black populations.

Table 1. Employed wage and salary workers by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, full- or part-time status, and union affiliation

(Numbers in thousands)

Age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and full- or part-time status	1989					1990				
	Total employed	Members of unions[1]		Represented by unions[2]		Total employed	Members of unions[1]		Represented by unions[2]	
		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed
SEX AND AGE										
Total, 16 years and over	103,480	16,980	16.4	19,196	18.6	103,906	16,740	16.1	19,058	18.3
16 to 24 years	19,154	1,203	6.3	1,424	7.4	18,337	1,178	6.4	1,410	7.7
25 years and over	84,325	15,757	18.7	17,773	21.1	85,568	15,562	18.2	17,648	20.6
25 to 34 years	31,210	4,471	14.3	5,150	16.5	30,972	4,336	14.0	4,991	16.1
35 to 44 years	25,316	5,292	20.9	5,975	23.6	26,411	5,323	20.2	6,023	22.8
45 to 54 years	16,233	3,719	22.9	4,134	25.5	16,558	3,685	22.3	4,138	25.0
55 to 64 years	9,302	2,056	22.1	2,272	24.4	9,279	2,008	21.6	2,254	24.3
65 years and older	2,265	220	9.7	243	10.7	2,348	209	8.9	243	10.3
Men, 16 years and older	54,789	10,820	19.7	11,955	21.8	54,828	10,564	19.3	11,731	21.4
16 to 24 years	9,892	775	7.8	899	9.1	9,303	771	8.1	900	9.5
25 years and older	44,897	10,045	22.4	11,056	24.6	45,525	9,793	21.8	10,831	23.9
25 to 34 years	17,056	2,899	17.0	3,237	19.0	16,824	2,776	16.5	3,119	18.5
35 to 44 years	13,201	3,297	25.0	3,647	27.6	13,797	3,278	23.8	3,606	26.1
45 to 54 years	8,518	2,383	28.0	2,583	30.3	8,582	2,335	27.2	2,557	29.8
55 to 64 years	4,965	1,344	27.1	1,455	29.3	4,961	1,297	26.2	1,425	28.7
65 years and older	1,157	121	10.5	133	11.5	1,162	104	9.0	124	10.7
Women, 16 years and older	48,691	6,141	12.6	7,243	14.9	49,077	6,175	12.6	7,327	14.9
16 to 24 years	9,262	428	4.6	525	5.7	8,834	407	4.6	509	5.8
25 years and older	39,428	5,712	14.5	6,717	17.0	40,243	5,768	14.3	6,817	16.9
25 to 34 years	14,153	1,571	11.1	1,913	13.5	14,148	1,558	11.0	1,872	13.2
35 to 44 years	12,114	1,995	16.5	2,327	19.2	12,614	2,044	16.2	2,417	19.2
45 to 54 years	7,715	1,336	17.3	1,550	20.1	7,976	1,350	16.9	1,581	19.8
55 to 64 years	4,337	712	16.4	817	18.8	4,318	711	16.5	828	19.2
65 years and older	1,108	99	8.9	110	9.9	1,186	106	8.8	119	10.0
RACE, HISPANIC ORIGIN, AND SEX										
White, 16 years and over	88,622	13,894	15.7	15,689	17.7	89,120	13,798	15.5	15,669	17.6
Men	47,410	9,140	19.3	10,055	21.2	47,515	8,914	18.8	9,865	20.8
Women	41,212	4,754	11.5	5,634	13.7	41,605	4,884	11.7	5,805	14.0
Black, 16 years and over	11,470	2,549	22.2	2,912	25.4	11,416	2,410	21.1	2,771	24.3
Men	5,587	1,387	24.8	1,566	28.0	5,541	1,350	24.4	1,523	27.5
Women	5,873	1,162	19.8	1,345	22.9	5,875	1,060	18.0	1,248	21.2
Hispanic origin, 16 years and over	7,894	1,196	15.2	1,330	16.8	8,181	1,209	14.8	1,348	16.5
Men	4,710	793	16.8	870	18.5	4,869	794	16.3	876	18.0
Women	3,184	403	12.6	460	14.5	3,312	415	12.5	472	14.2
FULL- OR PART-TIME STATUS[3]										
Full-time workers	84,563	15,701	18.6	17,683	20.9	85,082	15,422	18.1	17,469	20.5
Part-time workers	18,926	1,259	6.7	1,515	8.0	18,822	1,318	7.0	1,589	8.4

[1] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.

[2] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union as well as workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.

[3] The distinction between full- and part-time workers is based on hours usually worked.

NOTE: Data refer to the sole or principal job of full- and part-time workers. Excluded are self-employed workers whose businesses are incorporated although they technically qualify as wage and salary workers. Detail for the above race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.

Table 2. Employed wage and salary workers by occupation, industry, and union affiliation

(Numbers in thousands)

Occupation and industry	1989					1990				
	Total employed	Members of unions[1]		Represented by unions[2]		Total employed	Members of unions[1]		Represented by unions[2]	
		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed
OCCUPATION										
Managerial and professional specialty	25,357	3,739	14.7	4,606	18.2	25,671	3,674	14.3	4,572	17.8
Executive, administrative, and managerial	11,950	742	6.2	984	8.2	11,805	709	6.0	963	8.2
Professional specialty	13,406	2,997	22.4	3,622	27.0	13,866	2,965	21.4	3,609	26.0
Technical, sales, and administrative support	32,633	3,299	10.1	3,932	12.1	33,292	3,462	10.4	4,122	12.4
Technicians and related support	3,511	423	12.0	502	14.3	3,744	431	11.5	535	14.3
Sales occupations	11,354	574	5.1	670	5.9	11,522	580	5.0	678	5.9
Administrative support, including clerical	17,768	2,302	13.0	2,760	15.5	18,026	2,451	13.6	2,909	16.1
Service occupations	14,410	1,948	13.5	2,172	15.1	14,400	1,989	13.8	2,241	15.6
Protective service	1,955	750	38.3	816	41.8	1,940	755	38.9	840	43.3
Service, except protective service	12,455	1,198	9.6	1,356	10.9	12,460	1,235	9.9	1,401	11.2
Precision production, craft and repair	11,906	3,134	26.3	3,355	28.2	11,616	3,011	25.9	3,227	27.8
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	17,399	4,774	27.4	5,050	29.0	17,114	4,514	26.4	4,795	28.0
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	8,025	2,306	28.8	2,432	30.3	7,840	2,124	27.1	2,246	28.6
Transportation and material moving occupations	4,572	1,321	28.9	1,405	30.7	4,484	1,283	28.6	1,376	30.7
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	4,802	1,146	23.9	1,214	25.3	4,789	1,107	23.1	1,173	24.5
Farming, forestry, and fishing	1,774	67	3.8	82	4.6	1,812	89	4.9	100	5.5
INDUSTRY										
Agricultural wage and salary workers	1,499	18	1.2	31	2.1	1,530	29	1.9	33	2.1
Private nonagricultural wage and salary workers	84,504	10,520	12.4	11,556	13.7	84,610	10,227	12.1	11,336	13.4
Mining	664	117	17.5	131	19.7	675	121	18.0	136	20.2
Construction	5,322	1,145	21.5	1,203	22.6	5,122	1,073	21.0	1,137	22.2
Manufacturing	20,690	4,487	21.6	4,779	23.1	20,339	4,197	20.6	4,514	22.2
Durable goods	12,194	2,816	23.1	3,010	24.7	12,089	2,667	22.1	2,864	23.7
Nondurable goods	8,496	1,651	19.4	1,769	20.8	8,249	1,531	18.6	1,650	20.0
Transportation and public utilities	6,109	1,927	31.6	2,083	34.1	6,124	1,934	31.6	2,091	34.1
Transportation	3,535	1,047	29.6	1,105	31.3	3,517	1,031	29.3	1,093	31.1
Communications and public utilities	2,573	881	34.2	978	38.0	2,606	903	34.6	998	38.3
Wholesale and retail trade	21,136	1,321	6.3	1,478	7.0	21,274	1,338	6.3	1,493	7.0
Wholesale trade	3,939	269	6.8	308	7.8	3,993	261	6.5	293	7.3
Retail trade	17,198	1,052	6.1	1,170	6.8	17,281	1,077	6.2	1,200	6.9
Finance, insurance, and real estate	6,851	155	2.3	209	3.1	6,835	173	2.5	233	3.4
Services	23,731	1,388	5.8	1,673	7.0	24,241	1,391	5.7	1,731	7.1
Government workers	17,478	6,422	36.7	7,611	43.6	17,765	6,484	36.5	7,689	43.3

[1] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.

[2] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union as well as workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.

NOTE: Data refer to the sole or principal job of full- and part-time workers. Excluded are self-employed workers whose businesses are incorporated although they technically qualify as wage and salary workers.

Table 3. Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and union affiliation

Age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin	1989				1990			
	Total	Members of unions[1]	Represented by unions[2]	Non-union	Total	Members of unions[1]	Represented by unions[2]	Non-union
SEX AND AGE								
Total, 16 years and over	$389	$497	$494	$372	$415	$509	$507	$390
16 to 24 years	259	335	331	252	269	348	343	263
25 years and over	427	506	502	403	450	518	516	420
25 to 34 years	394	473	466	378	408	483	478	396
35 to 44 years	472	519	518	438	487	536	534	463
45 to 54 years	472	523	523	431	488	552	553	463
55 to 64 years	431	504	504	401	456	514	514	418
65 years and older	334	478	470	308	343	493	491	317
Men, 16 years and older	468	527	524	430	485	542	541	457
16 to 24 years	271	359	358	262	283	370	365	274
25 years and older	500	539	538	483	514	556	557	499
25 to 34 years	434	500	498	415	452	508	508	432
35 to 44 years	542	561	561	527	563	577	577	552
45 to 54 years	589	589	570	567	592	590	594	590
55 to 64 years	521	542	543	510	545	555	557	532
65 years and older	393	575	565	358	402	509	509	380
Women, 16 years and older	328	417	416	312	348	448	444	328
16 to 24 years	246	297	299	242	254	312	309	250
25 years and older	351	425	424	330	370	469	468	348
25 to 34 years	340	407	403	327	357	419	418	345
35 to 44 years	370	452	453	345	391	487	483	368
45 to 54 years	357	444	445	329	377	476	474	351
55 to 64 years	333	400	405	312	348	429	432	324
65 years and older	292	387	382	267	300	478	474	280
RACE, HISPANIC ORIGIN, AND SEX								
White, 16 years and over	409	506	503	384	427	521	518	402
Men	482	539	537	452	497	557	557	477
Women	334	427	423	317	355	461	458	335
Black, 16 years and over	319	425	423	290	329	440	434	302
Men	348	478	470	306	380	476	471	318
Women	301	385	390	278	308	404	403	286
Hispanic origin, 16 years and over	298	420	417	276	307	425	422	288
Men	315	457	451	291	322	464	460	301
Women	269	369	368	255	280	367	367	268

[1] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.

[2] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union as well as workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.

NOTE: Data refer to the sole or principal job of full-time workers. Excluded are self-employed workers whose businesses are incorporated although they technically qualify as wage and salary workers. Detail for the above race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.

Table 4. Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by occupation, industry, and union affiliation

Occupation and industry	1989				1990			
	Total	Members of unions[1]	Represented by unions[2]	Non-union	Total	Members of unions[1]	Represented by unions[2]	Non-union
OCCUPATION								
Managerial and professional specialty	$583	$584	$581	$584	$606	$610	$606	$606
Executive, administrative, and managerial	579	581	584	579	604	616	616	603
Professional specialty	586	585	581	589	610	609	606	613
Technical, sales, and administrative support	359	439	431	348	378	466	455	366
Technicians and related support	475	514	511	465	493	549	549	484
Sales occupations	384	388	391	384	401	406	406	401
Administrative support, including clerical	331	435	425	316	350	460	445	331
Service occupations	253	411	406	226	268	418	412	241
Protective service	445	575	574	340	468	583	579	382
Service, except protective service	230	329	323	217	245	344	338	229
Precision production, craft and repair	454	574	568	405	477	586	582	422
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	323	455	448	287	339	466	460	300
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	313	419	415	281	325	441	437	293
Transportation and material moving occupations	402	520	515	348	413	529	521	388
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	268	425	420	252	298	421	418	267
Farming, forestry, and fishing	246	393	379	239	257	373	373	251
INDUSTRY								
Agricultural wage and salary workers	249	[3]	[3]	246	260	[3]	[3]	259
Private nonagricultural wage and salary workers	387	$489	$485	368	403	$496	$493	386
Mining	565	572	572	561	565	587	583	553
Construction	431	642	634	393	456	653	642	407
Manufacturing	415	480	458	400	430	474	475	414
Durable goods	445	477	477	428	463	487	488	449
Nondurable goods	373	419	417	356	389	437	435	374
Transportation and public utilities	502	587	581	458	515	576	571	486
Transportation	475	583	579	403	488	583	579	423
Communications and public utilities	535	547	539	530	570	585	582	580
Wholesale and retail trade	305	407	402	298	319	410	406	313
Wholesale trade	412	477	478	406	442	475	471	438
Retail trade	276	381	375	270	292	390	384	286
Finance, insurance, and real estate	406	400	399	407	428	410	408	430
Services	357	398	402	352	378	413	416	373
Government workers	472	509	506	419	490	531	526	438

[1] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.

[2] Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union as well as workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.

[3] Data not shown where base is less than 50,000

NOTE: Data refer to the sole or principal job of full-time workers. Excluded are self-employed workers whose businesses are incorporated although they technically qualify as wage and salary workers.

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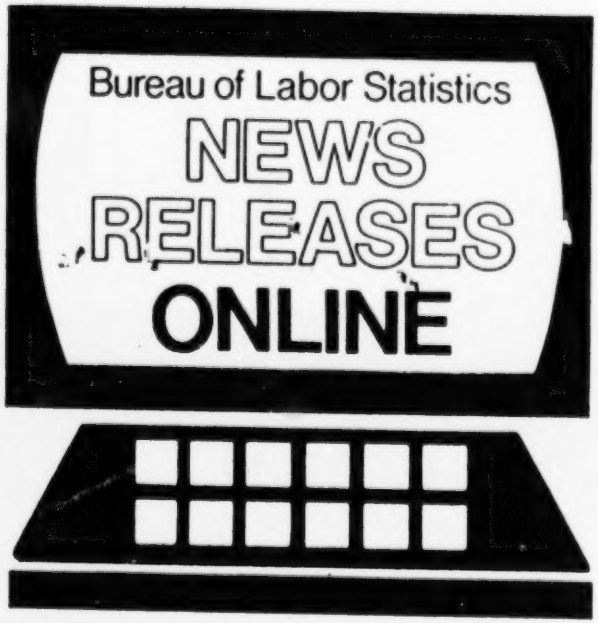

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